

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN.

BY THE EDITOR.

LUDWIG van Beethoven was a descendant of a humble Dutch family, which hailed from a little village of that name near Louvain. In 1680, one of his ancestors moved to Antwerp, and his grandfather Ludwig moved to Bonn, where he held the position of a tenor singer at the court of the archbishop, elector of Cologne. His son Johann was engaged as a bass and finally became the leader of the Electoral Band in 1773. Johann was married November 12, 1767, to Maria Magdalena Leyn, a widow, and daughter of Mr. Keverich, the chief cook at the Castle of Ehrenbreitstein. He had several children, of whom the famous composer Ludwig was the second.

Ludwig was born in December 1770 in the house which is still called the Beethoven house at Bonn, No. 515 Bonngasse, and has been bought by admirers of the great master and converted into a Beethoven museum.

Beethoven's grandfather died on Christmas eve, 1773, but his famous grandson distinctly remembered having seen him and retained in his memory a distinct impression of his face. The young Ludwig showed signs of extraordinary musical genius in early childhood. When eight years old he played in public, and yet he was far from being a premature child. His talents were rooted deep in the musical instincts of his soul, and were not merely the result of training. When ten years old he composed his first work, published three years later under the title "Variations." Though his father had devoted his life to music he could no longer be of any benefit to the child, who even then by far eclipsed his knowledge and skill, and so the boy received instructions from the best musicians obtainable in Bonn, Pfeiffer, a member of the Bonn opera, Van den Eeden, the organist, and his successor, Neeffe. He had not yet completed his eleventh year when Neeffe allowed him to take charge

of the organ, and when twelve years old he was sufficiently expert to lead the opera band. In the meantime he continued publishing new compositions, sonatas, and songs. He was not at first paid for his work at the opera, but on Neefe's recommendation he was later appointed assistant organist at a salary of 150 gulden, which position he retained after the death of the archbishop, Max Friedrich, under his successor, Max Franz, in 1783. In 1784 he published a "Song to a Baby," and a rondo for the piano. In 1785 he composed the song "When Some One Goes Atraveling," and he devoted much time in studying the violin under Franz Ries. At that time Mozart was at the height of his renown and the archbishop granted Beethoven's wish to meet this great composer at Vienna. In 1787 the youth took some lessons from Mozart and presumably also from Haydn. He had reached Vienna with a recommendation to Count Waldstein, who, with the sesame of the musician's divine genius, opened to him the houses of the Austrian nobility. There he also became acquainted with the Countess Hatzfeld and Madame von Breuning, whose little daughter and youngest son he instructed in music. In 1788 Beethoven lived again in Bonn, where he played the viola in the orchestra under the leadership of Reicha. Beethoven's home conditions had in the meantime grown desperate. His father had lost his voice, and in a mood of despair had taken to drinking. The archbishop, however, kindly continued the salary, but had part of it paid out to Ludwig whose genius was fully recognized at that time. The archbishop went even further and allowed Beethoven a leave of absence with full salary for two years that he might study in Vienna with the famous composer Haydn, who was a personal friend of the archbishop. In November 1792 Beethoven reached Vienna and studied there for some time with Haydn and later on with Schenck, but his relations with Haydn, though very cordial in the beginning, for unknown reasons ceased to be amicable. When Haydn left for London, Beethoven studied counterpoint with Albrechtsberger and violin with Schuppanzigh. The former, however, had a very poor opinion of his pupil, for he denounced him as incapable of learning and said he would never amount to anything. In 1792 Beethoven's father died, but the archbishop continued his pay to the family, nor did he cut off the allowance of Beethoven until his country was invaded by the French. At that time Beethoven gained another patron in the Prince Lichnowski, who kept a quartette at his disposal and paid him an annual allowance of 600 gulden.

Three periods may be distinguished in Beethoven's creative

work. The first extends to 1800 and comprises op. 1-20; the second to 1815, op. 21-100; and the third until the end of his life, op. 101-135.

In 1795 he appeared for the first time in public at the Burg theater (March 29), where he played his famous Concerto in C Major.

In the same year, December 18, he showed one of his compositions to his former teacher, Haydn, in a concert. At that time he made a trip to Nuremberg, Prague and Berlin, and was received everywhere with great honors. In 1798 Bernadotte came to Vienna as ambassador of the French republic. He met Beethoven, and it is assumed that he infused in him an admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte, the hero of Italy and Egypt. Beethoven saw in him the ideal man and composed in his honor a symphony which he called "The Eroica,"¹ but before he could send this great composition to Napoleon the news reached Vienna that the first consul of France had made himself emperor, and this infuriated the republican Beethoven to such an extent that he tore the title page into shreds, and trampled it under foot. But the composition itself remained. Beethoven only changed its plan and conceived its object to be the aspirations of a hero, his suffering and death, and finally his apotheosis, the victory of his ideals after the completion of his life, and so he added a funeral march as a third part in a triumphal tempo.

In 1801 on March 28 and on sixteen successive evenings his ballet Prometheus was performed in the Burg theater, and then began the most fertile period of his life. He wrote an oratorio, the "Mount of Olives," to the words of Huber. He composed a number of sonatas: one for the violin in A Minor and another in F; others for the piano in A Flat and D; and the two he entitled "Quasi Fantasia," the second of which has been called the "Moonlight" sonata from a reference to moonlight in a review by Rellstab, but Beethoven had not given it the name. Soon afterwards he composed the "Kreutzer" sonata and his opera "Fidelio."

In 1805 the famous Italian composer Cherubini visited Vienna, and these two great musicians became fast friends. In March, 1807, Beethoven appeared before the Vienna public in a great concert, in which he played for the first time the sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, called by his Hamburg publisher, Crantz, "Appassionata."

At that time Jérôme Bonaparte, king of Westphalia, offered Beethoven a position as orchestra leader at Cassel at a salary of

¹ See the discussion of this symphony by Baron von der Pfordten in *The Open Court*, August, 1911.

3000 gulden, but Beethoven declined. As a result of this refusal his three most eminent friends, Archduke Rudolf, Prince Carl Lichnowski and Prince Kinsky, offered him an annuity of 4000 gulden. Other patrons of the composer were Count Moritz Lichnowski, Count Rasumowski, Count Francis of Brunswick, Baron Gleichenstein and Stephen von Breuning.

Beethoven continued to compose although the symptoms of deafness irritated him and subjected him to fits of melancholia. In honor of Wellington's victory over the French at Vitoria he composed a "Battle Symphony." It was one of the two pieces of descriptive music Beethoven wrote, the other being his "Pastoral Symphony," in which is described the ideal country life whose pleasures are disturbed only by a thunderstorm. Beethoven's Eighth Symphony was first played in January, 1814, but it was not so well received as the Seventh Symphony, and this lack of success was attributed by Beethoven to its superiority.

In 1818 Beethoven wrote a grand mass² to celebrate the installation of his patron, the Archduke Rudolf as Archbishop of Olmütz, and he finished his Ninth Symphony.

In 1815 Beethoven's brother Caspar died and left a widow and one son, Karl, a boy of nine years. Beethoven had practically supported his brother's family and now took his nephew into his own home. The lad was rather a disappointment, for he only caused him cares without possessing any redeeming features. Having failed in his examinations for the University, and also for the Polytechnic, Karl attempted suicide, was arrested and warned to leave Vienna. Later on he enlisted in the army, and in 1826 he visited his uncle Johann, another brother of Beethoven, at his farm at Gneixendorf, near Krems. There he met his benefactor, his uncle Ludwig, who invited him to go back to Vienna. On the way, however, Beethoven took a severe cold, which resulted in pneumonia, and his condition was aggravated by symptoms of dropsy. Medical relief was in vain, and on March 24, 1827, he received the last sacraments, and died on Monday, the 16th, during a violent thunderstorm. The remains were buried in the Währinger cemetery with great honors and in the presence of the highest aristocracy of the Austrian capital.

Nature lavished on Beethoven only the one gift. His presence was not prepossessing, rather the contrary. He was only five feet five inches high, and a certain awkwardness of his stature

² Baron von der Pfordten's sympathetic explanation of this mass will be found in *The Open Court*, Sept. 1910, "The Missa Solemnis."

was by no means improved by his pock-marked face. His hair grew in abundance; he had to shave even up to his eyes, and his fingers too were covered with hair. Nevertheless, he was by no means ugly, for his sturdy appearance was transfigured by his bright black eyes, which betrayed the genius that lived in him. He was muscular and strong, and his strength seemed also to affect his music, so as to suggest to the sculptor Klinger to represent him as a Titan. His manners were rough and his republican ideas jarred on the aristocratic circles in which he moved. Nevertheless he remained a friend of the highest nobility of Vienna, including the emperor himself. They appreciated his genius and gladly overlooked the whims with which he frequently irritated even his best friends. With all his troubles Beethoven not only wrote compositions in the most elevated and noblest style but could also give musical expression to his humors, the best known instance of which is his sonata on the "Lost Penny," which describes his irritation while searching for a misplaced piece of money. While vexed at his failure in finding the coin, he gave expression to his feelings in this wonderful piece of music.

Another humorous incident is told of a rival composer, Steibelt, whom he met at the house of Count Fries. Beethoven had composed a trio for piano, clarinet and cello, and Steibelt gave vent to his jealousy by writing a quintette performed a week later, which contained a finale ridiculing Beethoven's trio. Then Beethoven took up the theme and turned Steibelt's composition into ridicule by playing it with variations in such a comical manner that the angry Steibelt left the house in indignation.

Beethoven attained the fullest expression of absolute music. He has remained unexcelled, and it seems as if Music herself had revealed the expression of her highest inspiration in his works. Though he holds the first rank as a composer the work of composition was by no means easy to him. He did not work with the same facility as Mozart or Haydn or Handel or Bach. His inspirations came to him as the result of much brooding, and even then he worked out his theme with great diligence. He took long walks and carried with him a note book in which he sketched down his schemes and the plans of their execution, and these sketches show how often he modified and changed his original ideas. He could extemporize with great facility, but none of his great works are the product of a moment of inspiration. All of them have been forged in the laboratory of his musical thoughts, and every detail of their melodies as well as their harmony has been considered with

greatest care. As a result we have not one of his works which does not bear the stamp of perfection. His compositions are like a revelation of the laws of music. He has not created new forms, but what his predecessors have handed down to him he has broadened as well as deepened, and in every one of them he stands unexcelled.